INTRODUCTION

Why did seemingly stable East European federations break up after the collapse of state socialism? A number of explanations emerged following the dissolutions of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, grouped around ethnicity/nationalism, politics, and economics.

i) Ethnic/nationalist conflict explanations. In the case of Yugoslavia the popular view blames the dissolution on ancient hatreds among the country’s constituent ethnic groups.\(^1\) Many analysts see ethnic mobilization and the rise of nationalism as a result of other factors, such as the communists’ nationalist policies or the economic crisis of the 1980s.\(^2\) In Czechoslovakia, persistent ethnic tensions and nationalism have been also viewed as the root of the breakup, albeit less frequently than in the Yugoslav case.\(^3\)

ii) Political explanations. The prevalent view in the case of Yugoslavia ascribes the principal cohesive function of the federation to Tito, whose death triggered the country’s unraveling despite the support of federal institutions, including the Communist Party.\(^4\) Some scholars focus on the peculiarities and consequences of Yugoslavia’s decentralized political system.\(^5\) An alternative explanation concerns the failure of the political elites to agree on the new setup of the government.\(^6\) In the case of Czechoslovakia, political issues constitute the majority of academic explanations for the breakup: the dissolution resulted from the failure of

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political elites to find a new constitutional model of the federation acceptable to all sides during the transition to market economy.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{iii) Economic explanations.} The increasing economic disparities among Yugoslavia’s regions and the federation’s economic decentralization, leading to fragmentation of its economy, are deemed the principal cause of the dissolution.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, Czechoslovakia’s economic history and differences in the levels of economic development constitute the deeper cause of political disagreements during the democratic transition.\textsuperscript{9}

There is a conspicuous lack of comparative studies in the discourse on the dissolutions of the formerly socialist federations, the most notable exceptions being those by Valerie Bunce and Andrew C. Janos.\textsuperscript{10} This volume will contribute to comparative research on the dissolutions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia by reconsidering the role of elites. Although mobilization of political elites has been used as an explanation for the two breakups, the main shortcoming has been a lack of conceptualization in a coherent pattern or model. This volume remedies this weakness by adopting the theoretical framework of relative deprivation, which, unlike alternative theories of ethnic political mobilization, explains political mobilizations of all ethnic groups.


\textsuperscript{10} See Valerie Bunce, \textit{Subversive Institutions. The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), who focuses on the institutional design of the socialist federations and on the expansion of opportunities for change in the 1980s; Andrew C. Janos, \textit{Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: Ethnic Conflict and the Dissolution of Multinational States} (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), who analyzes the coincidence of ethnicity and economic disparities and ascribes the dissolutions to rational calculations of self-interest of elites, while also stressing the international context. Other studies include Ivo Bicanic, “The Economic Causes of New State Formation During Transition.” \textit{East European Politics and Societies} 9, no. 1 (1995): 2-19, who considers the splits as a result of rational economic policy choices during transition; and Milica Zarkovic Bookman, \textit{The Economics of Secession} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), who perceives the dissolutions as economically oriented secessions associated to perceptions of injustice concerning resource allocation.
The relative deprivation approach will be related to economic factors, which will, in turn, be used as a basis for explaining political mobilization of both inferior elites (offensive mobilization) and dominant elites (defensive mobilization). A model relating both types of political mobilization of ethnic elites will address the related question of how and why modernization leads to the dissolution of federal states.

In the complex pattern of interacting and mutually reinforcing offensive and defensive mobilizations, offensive economically or politically motivated ethnic mobilization does not necessarily lead to federal dissolutions because the inferior ethnic groups seek to improve their status within the existing federal framework. The type of mobilization with the capacity to dissolve a federal state is the defensive resource driven mobilization of economically dominant ethnic groups’ political elites. This capacity of defensive mobilization is made possible by a considerable external shock in the international political arena, releasing constraints on the federal discourse and borders. In sum, modernization seems to aggravate rather than mitigate ethnic conflict.

The emphasis on the role of elites is based on the assumption that political elites make and implement politically relevant decisions. To borrow the words of Tom Bottomore referring to classical approaches to elites, “in every society there is, and must be, a minority which rules over the rest of society; this minority - the ‘political class’ or ‘governing elite’, [is] composed of those who occupy the post of political command and (...) those who can directly influence political decisions (…)”.

The first chapter will delineate the theoretical framework for the explanation of the two breakups. In Chapter 2, the discussion will turn to the cases of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Following a review of each country’s political history, providing background for analysis, the greater part of both case studies will present each federation’s economic histories, with special emphasis on redistribution efforts aimed at equalizing the levels of economic development among the constituent republics. Analysis of each case will then highlight the pattern of ethnic political mobilization around economic issues, which led to the two breakups in the post-Cold War international context. Finally, Chapter 3 will outline an explanatory theoretical model describing the two breakups as a result of the pattern of offensive vs. defensive political mobilization.

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3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1. Dissolution of federal states

The case studies on the dissolutions of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia represent the basis of the model of ethnic political mobilization fueled by relative deprivation. The dissolution of both federations from this standpoint proceeded in five stages.

Uneven levels of economic development of the respective republics represent the starting point of analysis. By definition, relative deprivation and the working of the model of political mobilization must be perceived in the context of economic disparities. The underlying assumption is that regional disparities are a natural phenomenon and as such are impossible to overcome.

In the second stage, development occurred with particular emphasis on both countries’ underdeveloped regions with the aim of equalizing their levels of economic development with the developed republics. Equalization undertaken in both federations by the communist governments was closely intertwined with relevant political and ideological objectives.

Modernization improved the economic situation of the relevant populations. However, the resulting opening of new opportunities, regardless of their extent, shifted aspiration levels and triggered the feelings of relative deprivation. In the third stage, relative deprivation can occur on the side of economically underprivileged ethnic groups and their political representatives, who may argue that real economic improvements are not equal to the potential ones, which could occur in case of even higher redistribution. In Yugoslavia, the underdeveloped republics always demanded more resource transfers, arguing that existing transfers were insufficient to boost growth in their economies. In Czechoslovakia, the Slovaks felt discriminated against despite the relatively impressive successes of the federal equalization strategy. During the democratic transition they wanted the market reforms to respect the specific character of their economy. Thus, the political elites of the underdeveloped regions or republics mobilized themselves offensively, demanding more resources.

Fourth, the economically superior ethnic groups and their respective political representatives used relative deprivation as an argument as well. The elites of Yugoslavia’s developed republics constantly voiced dissatisfaction with the high rates of redistribution and
waste of transferred resources. As a result, in the course of the final economic reforms, the
developed republics refused to further contribute to the federal funds. Similarly, the Czechs
argued against the positive discrimination of the Slovak economy, and later against the
continuation of fund transfers. During the transition, they argued for a continuation of
economic reforms in an unaltered manner. Thus, in the developed regions providing resources
for the development of the less-developed regions, political elites reacted to the demands of
the latter in the form of defensive political mobilization.

The perceptions of injustice became a tool in the mobilization of political elites on all
sides. In adopting the rhetoric of relative deprivation, which claimed injustice had been or was
being done to their ethnic groups, the elites sought to preserve their power by claiming to
represent and defend their group’s interests. Ethnic arguments became an instrument in the
elites’ pursuit of power and, to a varying extent, succeeded in creating the perception of
derprivation among their respective populations.

The equalization projects in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia bore rather opposite
results. Success or failure of equalization, therefore, bears no significance for the dissolutions.
It is modernization as such that is important for creating the perception of relative deprivation
and, consequently, for its use in the pattern of ethnic political mobilization. Regardless of the
results of the development strategy, a certain shift in the economic conditions is bound to
occur. And regardless of the magnitude of this change in the economic situation, the shift is
bound to create the perceptions of relative deprivation.

The final stage in the process is the dissolution itself. The pattern of political
mobilization was insufficient to bring about the end of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia during
the communist period. The climax of the pattern of political mobilization, expressed as the
dissolution of the two federal states, was made possible only in the new post-Cold War
context.

3.2. Model of political mobilization

Based on the five-stage process of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia,
conclusions emerge regarding the pattern of ethnic political mobilization. First, political
mobilization during the existence of both countries led to the dissolution only when the
opportunity gap for secession opened in the late 1980s with the alleviation of international
constraints. The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe during the perestroika released the constraints on domestic discourses, which enabled freer expression of opinions and accelerated political mobilization of national elites. When the communist regimes fell in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the complete elimination of constraints on domestic developments, resulting in the introduction of the freedom of speech and political pluralism, was accompanied by the eradication of constraints on external borders. The new absence of constraints accelerated the pattern of political mobilization, setting into its highest gear. The new opportunities for action on the domestic and international level then enabled fragmentation of the two federal states and the creation of new independent nation states.

Figure 1. Position of the relevant republics within the analyzed federations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Position</th>
<th>Economic Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inferiority</td>
<td>1 Slovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
<td>3 Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferiority</td>
<td>2 Slovenia / Croatia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiority</td>
<td>4 Czech Republic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The first dimension in the figure concerns political position of a republic within its respective federation. The politically dominant Czech Republic and Serbia stand against the politically inferior Slovakia and Slovenia/Croatia. The other dimension concerns the level of economic development. The economically superior republics, Czech Republic and Slovenia/Croatia, served as sources of transfers to the economically inferior regions, Slovakia and Serbia.

The model of the political mobilization in the new international and domestic context is as follows. Offensive political mobilization of elites representing politically inferior ethnic groups, or offensive politically driven mobilization, resulted in demands for more rights within the federal framework (Figure 1, sectors 1 and 2). Offensive political mobilization of economically inferior nations, or offensive economically driven mobilization, resulted in increased demands in the economic realm, but still within the federal framework (sectors 1 and 3). The objective of offensive political mobilization, either politically or economically...
driven, was not independence, and therefore this type of political mobilization did not directly lead to dissolution of the federal states.

Offensive political mobilization of political elites of the inferior nations in the new setting naturally provoked defensive reactions on part of the respective superior nations. *Defensive political mobilization* of politically superior elites, or defensive politically driven mobilization, represented a reaction to offensive demands of politically inferior groups (sectors 3 and 4). However, this still was not a sufficient incentive to seek independence. Crucial in both cases was the defensive political mobilization of economically superior groups, or defensive economically driven political mobilization. The decision to seek independence based on the defense of the superior group’s economic position emerged as a reaction to excessive demands of the economically inferior ethnic group. The threat to the established economic position of the economically dominant group served as a greater impetus for the dissolution of each federation (sectors 2 and 4).

The cost-benefit calculation of the elites from each sector in the figure supports this conclusion. Since the external political environment in the late 1980s and early 1990s allowed for the creation of independent states, the causes of dissolution must be sought in the domestic context of power seeking. The politically superior elites wished to preserve their dominance in their federation and avoided pursuing dissolution. The political benefits of federation (larger power base), prevailed over the costs of independence (smaller power base). The solution for the economically inferior nations, too, was to pursue more concessions within the federal framework; the economic benefits of federation prevailed over the costs of independence. However, when it came to the economically superior nations, the benefits of independence considerably outweighed the costs of federation. Such rational calculations of economic factors decided on the final tilt toward the dissolution of both federations.

The pattern of offensive vs. defensive ethnic political mobilization that was in play in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia must be viewed in its entire complexity: it was a pattern of mutual interactions, mutually and gradually reinforcing patterns of action/reaction, or offense/defense, in which the final step resulted from an economic cost-benefit calculation. However, the two dissolutions were multifaceted phenomena and their causes went beyond economics; additional analysis would trace the political mobilization pattern in the political sphere as well. Still, it seems that in the mobilizing calculations of the elites of the economically dominant ethnic groups, economic factors played a large role. The prospect of a rapid transformation to the market economy without having to share the wealth
with their underdeveloped federal neighbors seem to have prevailed among the politicians in their calculations. These elites perceived the market reforms and their anticipated success as the only possible way to provide legitimacy for their power.

3.3. Final remarks

The conclusion, that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia resulted from rational calculations of political entrepreneurs representing the economically better-off republics and defensively mobilized to protect their interests, ought not to be considered as an attempt to blame the breakups on any particular side. The two dissolutions resulted from complex interactions within the framework of the model of elites’ offensive vs. defensive political mobilization, in which the defense of economic interests was the final push toward independence. The model of reactive mobilizations conceptualized the political disputes that led to the two dissolutions.

The emphasis on the international context showed that instability on the international level can lead to a degree of uncertainty over the position of an ethnic group, the political representatives of which may then incorporate the resulting threats or opportunities into their political operational framework. In addition to the defensive political mobilization of an economically dominant ethnic group’s elites incorporating the benefits of independence into their calculations, the international political climate that allowed for viable independent existence significantly contributed to the dissolutions as well.

Even though the political elites managed to recall the feelings of relative deprivation in the populations they represented, it is important to recognize the relevance of political decisions, rather than popular sentiments, in shaping historical events. It seems that in Czechoslovakia, more than in Yugoslavia, the dissolution of the federation was a political decision. In both cases, like anywhere else, political decisions and their implementation remain a matter of political elites.

The dissolutions of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were not a historical necessity. Political events are a function of individual choices of politicians. That individual political decisions can be retrospectively placed into a context of a trend, model or pattern changes nothing about their impact. Understanding the patterns of decision-making should help to foresee future political actions.